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ABSTRACT

This guide presents questions that parents frequently ask about their children's school, along with answers to those questions. The questions and answers were prepared based on the results of studies conducted by the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, the U.S. Department of Education, the GTE Foundation, and by the National Center for Education Statistics. Questions address topics of: (1) starting school (What expectations will the teacher have for my child?); (2) schoolwork (How can I get information about my child's school performance? What can I do to foster reading? What can I do to help my child's success in school?); (3) homework (How much homework should my child have? How can I help my child with homework?); (4) career preparation (How can I help my child make a successful transition from school to the university or to work? What classes should my child take in secondary school in order to be able to go to the university?); (5) safety (What can I do so that my child is safe and doesn't use drugs?); and (6) family expectations (What can I do so that school personnel know my family's hopes, dreams, and values? In what way can I be involved in my child's school?). (BC)

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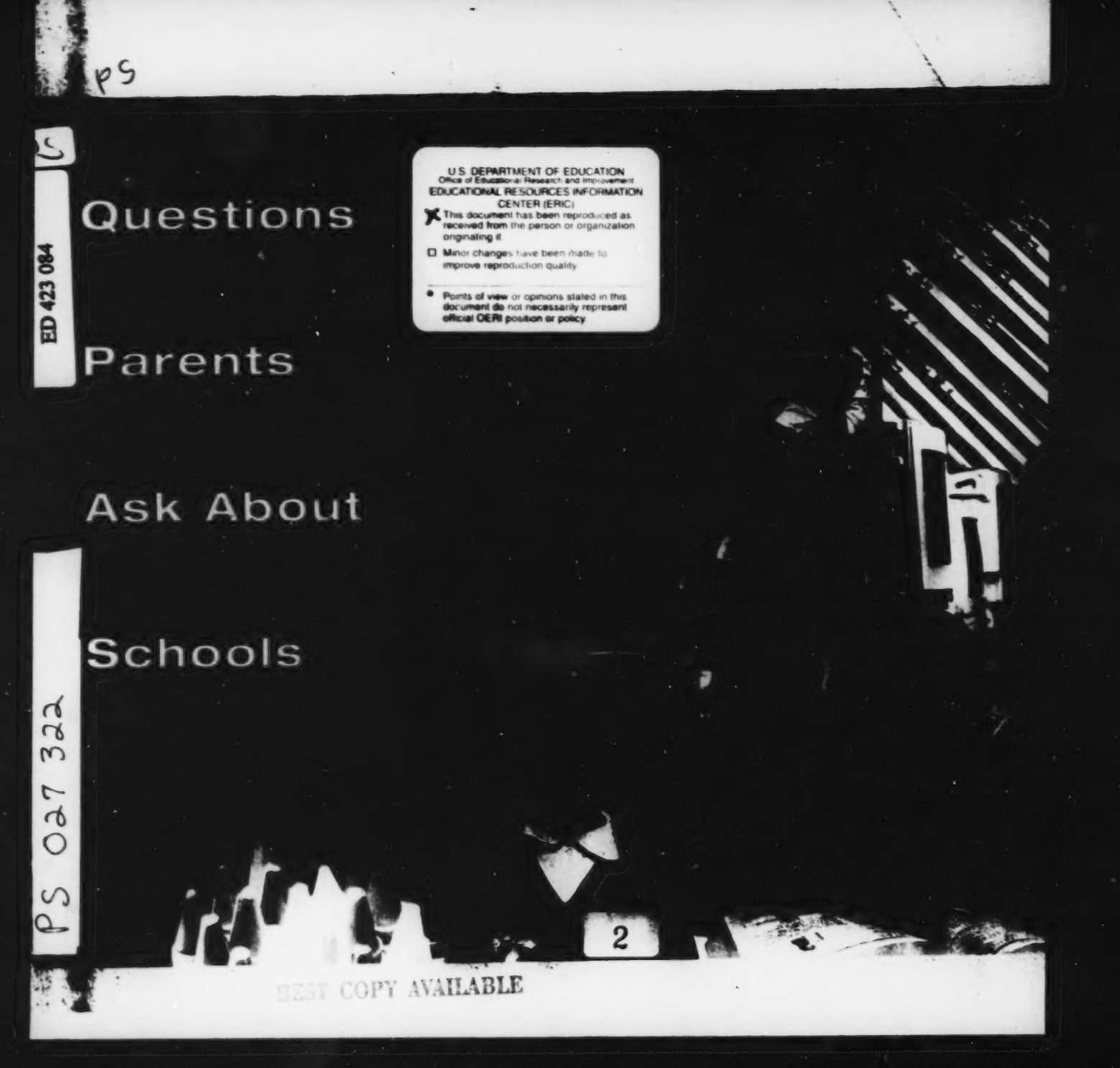

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Questions Parents Ask About Schools

These questions and answers were prepared by staff from Parent Information and Resource Centers across the United States, funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

Survey results are from:

- A survey sponsored by the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, the U.S. Department of Education, and the GTE Foundation, conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago.
- Fathers' Involvement in Their Children's Schools, a survey by the National Center for Education Statistics.

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On Starting School

What will my child's kindergarten teacher expect of my child?

Expectations may vary among teachers and schools, but the following behaviors and skills seem to be common:

- Children will be expected to follow simple rules and instructions.
- Children will be expected to be able to concentrate on a task for 10 to 20 minutes.
- Social skills and self-control skills such as sharing and taking turns will be emphasized. These skills help children get along well with teachers and other children.
- Children will be expected to do as much for themselves as possible, such as taking care of their personal belongings, hanging up their own clothes, and putting away their own crayons and papers.

Fifty-seven percent of children age 3 to 5 are read aloud to by a family member every day each week.

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On School Work

How can I tell how my child is doing in school?

- Ask your child to show you his or her school work, and note the grades and comments by the teacher.
- Check report cards carefully for grades in each subject, attendance, and conduct. Ask the teacher or school counselor for other kinds of information about your child's performance such as test scores and teacher observations.
- Attend your school's regular parent-teacher conferences and bring any questions or concerns. Ask for a special meeting if necessary. Regular phone calls and notes are also a good way to increase the information shared between teachers and parents.
- Use homework hotlines and other dial-in services to get information about school activities or to ask questions.
- Ask to see examples of successful student work and compare it to your child's work. Listen to the teacher's comments on the work, and what your child needs to do to improve. Plan with the teacher how you both can work together to help your child learn more.
- If you see a serious problem, ask the teacher to report on your child's progress by a phone call each week during the next grading period.
- Don't criticize your child's teacher in front of the child. This makes chi[illegible] their behavior.

There is a gap between schools letting parents understand what their child should know academically and showing what constitutes successful work at each grade. While 52 percent of parents said the school lets them know what their child should know and be able to do in each subject, a full 63 percent of parents said the school did not do a very good job of providing examples of successful student work.

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How can I encourage my child to read?

- **Read yourself.** When your child sees you reading the newspaper or curling up with a book, he or she will want to follow your example.

- **Make sure that your child reads on his or her own or that you or someone else reads to him or her daily.** Reading is a skill. Children who spend at least 30 minutes a day reading for fun develop the skills to be better readers at school.

- **Get the library habit.** Make sure that everyone in your family has a library card. Schedule regular trips to the library.

- **Read aloud to your child.** This is the most important thing a parent can do to help a child become a better reader. Start reading to your child when he or she is young and keep reading as he or she grows up.

- **Use your newspaper to encourage reading.** Ask your young child to find things in the day's paper such as:

  A map of the United States
  A picture of an athlete
  Three words beginning with "s"

- **Give books as gifts.** Find a special place for your child to keep his or her own library of books.

Thirty percent of children aren't able to read at the basic level.

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What can I do to help my child succeed in school?

- Ask the teacher for ideas on how you can help your child learn more at home and show your support for special interests by attending science fairs, plays, musical events, class trips, or sporting events.

- Read with your child, even if he or she is older, and show an interest in what is done in school each day.

- Use television wisely. Limit television viewing to no more than 2 hours on a school night.

- Tell your child that you believe he or she can do well in school. Stress that students get good grades by hard work and not just because "some students are smart." Offer praise and encouragement for achievement and improvement.

- Enroll your child in an after-school program that links learning in the after-school hours with what takes place in the regular school program.

- Establish a daily family routine of mealtimes, time for homework and chores, bedtime, and time for family talk.

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Monitor your child's activities after school, in the evenings, and on weekends. Many working parents can arrange for children to check in after school and discuss their plans by phone.

Talk with your child about positive values and personal traits, such as respect for self and others, hard work, and responsibility. Show your values by your actions.

If you need help with a school-related problem, contact your child's teacher, the school counselor or principal.

Seventy-nine percent of parents report that they want to learn more about how to be involved in their children's learning. Seventy-seven percent of parents also think that their children's teachers could learn more about involving parents in their children's learning.

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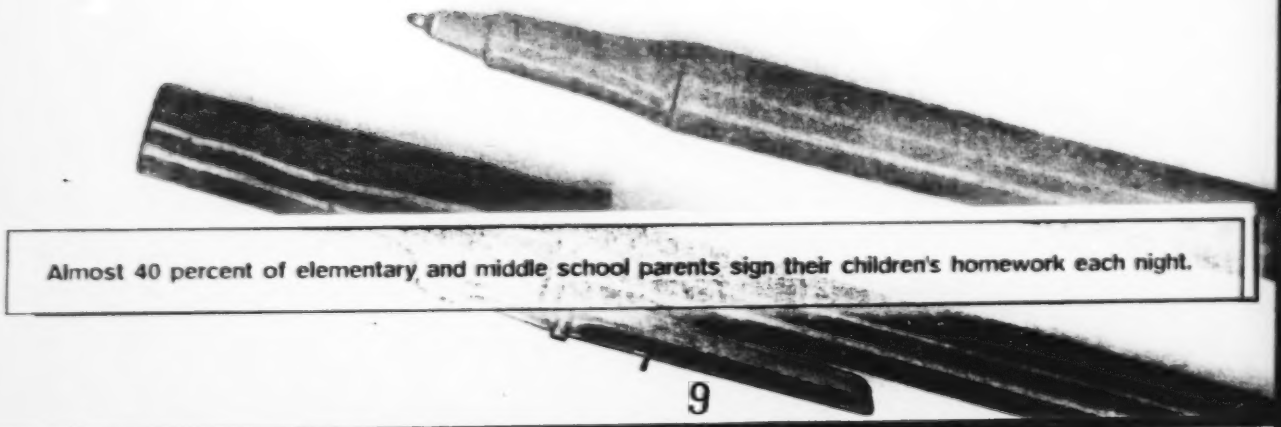
On Homework

How much homework should my child have?

- There is no correct or best amount of homework. However, many school districts recommend 15-45 minutes a day in 3rd-6th grades, 45-75 minutes in 7th-9th grades, and 75-120 minutes in 10th-12th grade.

- Expect your child to keep notes on daily assignments. Ask him or her to tell you what he or she is doing in class and for homework.

- If your child has no homework day after day, you may want to talk to your child's teacher.



Almost 40 percent of elementary and middle school parents sign their children's homework each night.

How can I help my child with homework?

- Agree with your child on a set time to do homework every day.
- Encourage your child to study at a desk or table rather than in a bed or easy chair.
- If it is hard for your child to sit still or concentrate for more than a short period of time, encourage him or her to walk while looking at flash cards or talk aloud when reviewing information.
- Discourage distractions like TV, conversations in the background, or calls from friends during homework time.
- If your child can't get started, talk through the assignments with him or her. Be supportive but avoid doing the homework for your child.
- If you are unable to help your child with a difficult subject, ask for help from a relative. Also ask if the school, library, or a community or religious organization can provide tutoring or homework help through an after-school program. Encourage your child to participate in study groups with classmates.
- Check to see that all the work is done, and sign it if your school requires this.
- Provide study aids such as a computer, dictionary, thesaurus, or encyclopedias. Show how to use them.
- If you have more than one child, encourage them to help each other. Older children can often strengthen their own skills by helping younger children and reinforce their skills while helping the younger child learn.

While schools do many things to involve parents in the schooling process, fewer than one-half of all parents had been formally asked by schools about what assistance they might need to be more involved in their children's learning.

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On Preparing for a Career

What can I do to help my child move successfully from school to college or work?

- Start talking to your children at an early age about careers and the kind of education he or she will need to reach his or her goals. Expose your children to many different careers through contacts with teachers, friends, employers, and career counselors.

- Encourage your child to attend career and college fairs. Attend as many of these events as you can with your child. Most future jobs will require not only a high school diploma, but 1-4 years of community college, 4 years of college, and/or specialty training.

- Take your child to work if you can.

- Ask the high school counselor about programs that combine study at school with work or classes at a technical college to prepare students for well-paying jobs (sometimes these programs are called Tech-Prep, School-to-Career, or School-to-Work).

- Make sure your child is enrolled in the high school courses needed for admission to college or to secure a well-paying job.

- Make sure your child takes the tests, starting not later than 9th grade, that many colleges review as part of the admissions process. Students who take these tests more than once usually improve their scores.

- Encourage your child to be involved in activities such as organized after-school programs, community service, academic clubs, technology or vocational clubs, the school newspaper, drama and music programs, art, and athletics.

- Relate your child's interests to a variety of career choices.

According to a recent survey of parents, of the 84 percent who were employed some time during the last year, 29 percent had employers that provided them with information about ways to pay for their children to attend college or receive other education after high school. Seventy-nine percent of working parents reported that having this service was important to them.

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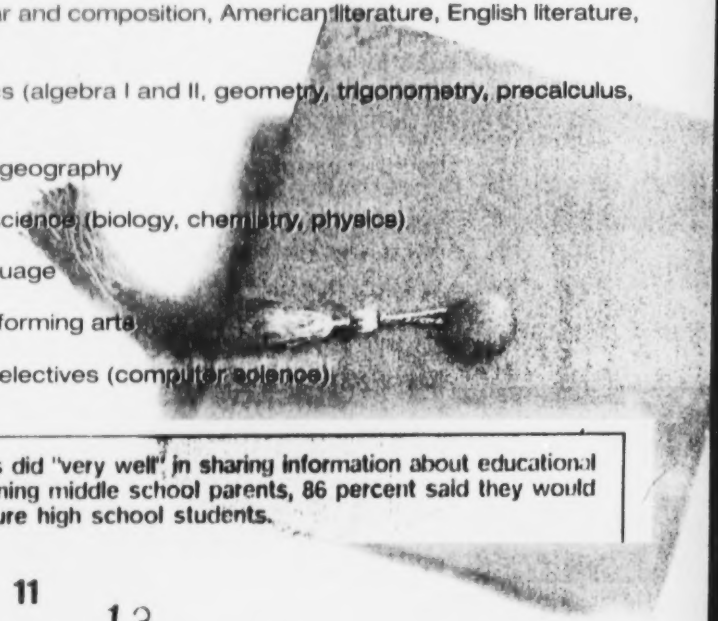
What high school courses should my child take to get into college?

- A college education builds on the knowledge and skills acquired in earlier years. Parents should plan with their children, starting not later than 7th or 8th grade, to make sure they can complete all the appropriate middle and high school courses needed for college admission, beginning with plans to take algebra in the 8th grade.

- Students usually have more difficulty with college courses if they haven't taken courses to prepare them in high school.

- Academic requirements differ among colleges, but the admissions requirements listed below are typical of four-year colleges:

  - 4 years of English (grammar and composition, American literature, English literature, world literature)
  - 3 to 4 years of mathematics (algebra I and II, geometry, trigonometry, precalculus, calculus)
  - 2 to 3 years of history and geography
  - 3 to 4 years of laboratory science (biology, chemistry, physics)
  - 2 to 3 years of foreign language
  - 1 year of the visual and performing arts
  - 1 to 3 years of appropriate electives (computer science)



Only 30 percent of middle school parents said schools did "very well" in sharing information about educational options for future high school students. Of the remaining middle school parents, 86 percent said they would like to learn more about educational options for future high school students.

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On Safety

How can I help my child be safe and drug free?

- Talk to your child about alcohol, tobacco, and drug use. Discuss with your child how being with others who use alcohol, tobacco, and drugs can harm him or her.

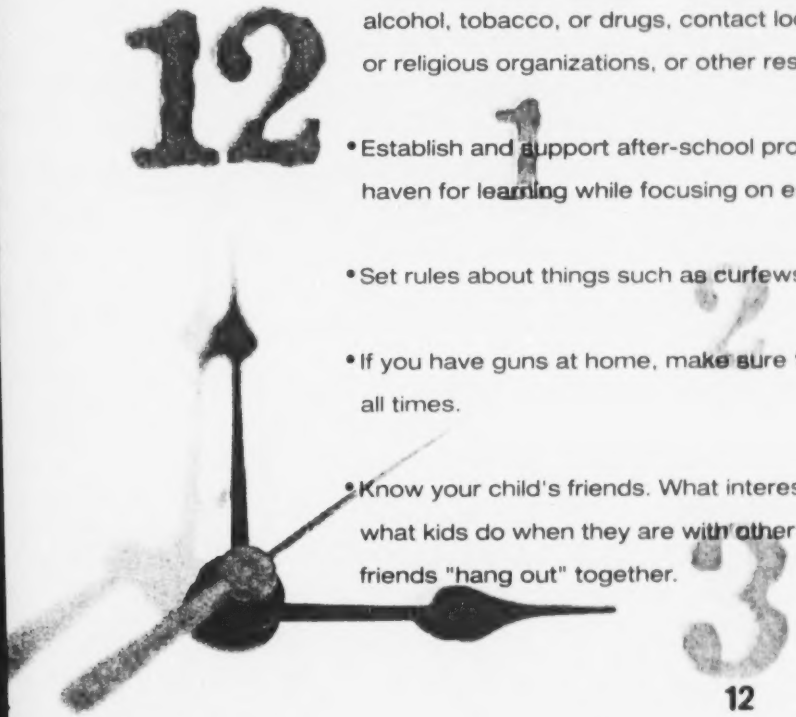
- Know the signs of alcohol, tobacco, and drug use. If you suspect that your child is using alcohol, tobacco, or drugs, contact local health or service agencies, support groups, faith or religious organizations, or other resources for ways to help.

- Establish and support after-school programs for adolescents and teens that provide a safe haven for learning while focusing on enrichment, recreation, and community service.

- Set rules about things such as curfews, chaperoned parties, and places that are off-limits.

- If you have guns at home, make sure they are kept locked up and away from children at all times.

- Know your child's friends. What interests do they share? Listen to your child's stories about what kids do when they are with other adults and when adults aren't around, and learn why friends "hang out" together.



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- Develop a parent network in your community where parents sign a contract to supervise parties at their home and not allow the use of drugs or alcohol. Share the list of parents and their telephone numbers with the network. Encourage parents to call if there is a question or concern.

- Read the school's discipline policies and discuss them with your child.

- Work with the school to develop a plan to handle safety and substance abuse problems, such as drug education and violence prevention programs, and drug-free dances, proms, and graduation parties.

Only 35 percent of parents currently send their children to an after-s[illegible]rog[illegible], but almost 80 pe[illegible] would like their children to attend a school-based, after-school progra[illegible]udents continue[illegible] in a safe environment outside of school hours.

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On Family Expectations

How do I let school staff know what is important to my family–our hopes, dreams, and values?

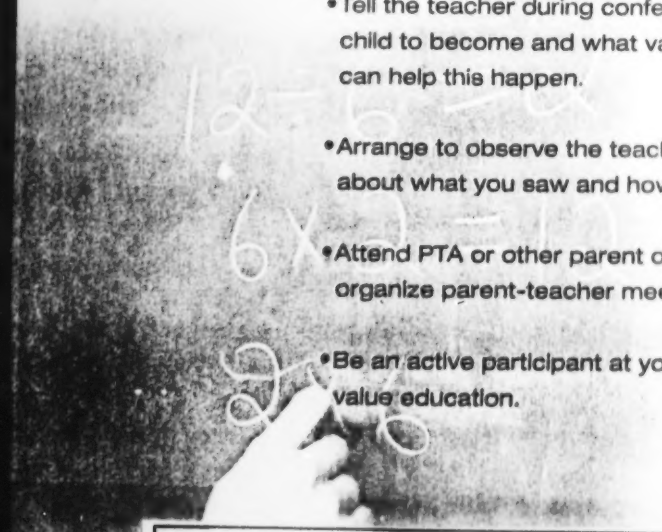
- Attend back-to-school nights, student exhibitions, and other school events. Get to know the teachers and other school staff. Listen to their plans, what they hope to accomplish with their students, and why they choose these goals.

- Tell the teacher during conferences or other meetings what kind of person you want your child to become and what values are important to you. Discuss together how the school can help this happen.

- Arrange to observe the teaching in your child's classroom. Afterward, talk with the teacher about what you saw and how it fits with your hopes for your child and your child's needs.

- Attend PTA or other parent organization meetings. Voice your hopes and concerns. Help organize parent-teacher meetings around your interests and those of other parents.

- Be an active participant at your child's school; show the staff as well as your child that you value education.



Students in 1st-12th grade are more likely to get mostly A's and enjoy school, and are less likely to repeat a grade, if their parents are involved with their school.

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What are some ways I can be involved with my child's school?

- Volunteer to tutor in the classroom, or help in the office or the cafeteria. Schools always need adult help with field trips and other outside events.
- Help with activities that can be done at home such as taking part in a telephone tree to notify other parents of upcoming activities and making educational tools for the teacher.
- Help develop and promote family-school agreements or compacts that outline mutual responsibilities for improving student learning.
- Work in a parent resource center or help start one. In these school centers, parents may gather informally, borrow materials on parenting and children's school work, and get information about community services.
- Join a parent patrol or help start one to make the school safer.
- Volunteer to serve on advisory groups to your school. They may consider everything from school policies and programs to the kinds of parent involvement activities the school plans.
- If you are comfortable with technology, volunteer to be a computer tutor for students and teachers or ask if there are other ways you can help the school to use technology.
- Help translate school materials, if you can, for non-English speaking parents in your school.
- Take part in your school's parent-teacher association or help start one.

Eighty-nine percent of elementary and middle school parents agree that schools treat parents as partners in their children's learning. Seventy-two percent of parents want to be more involved in their children's schools.

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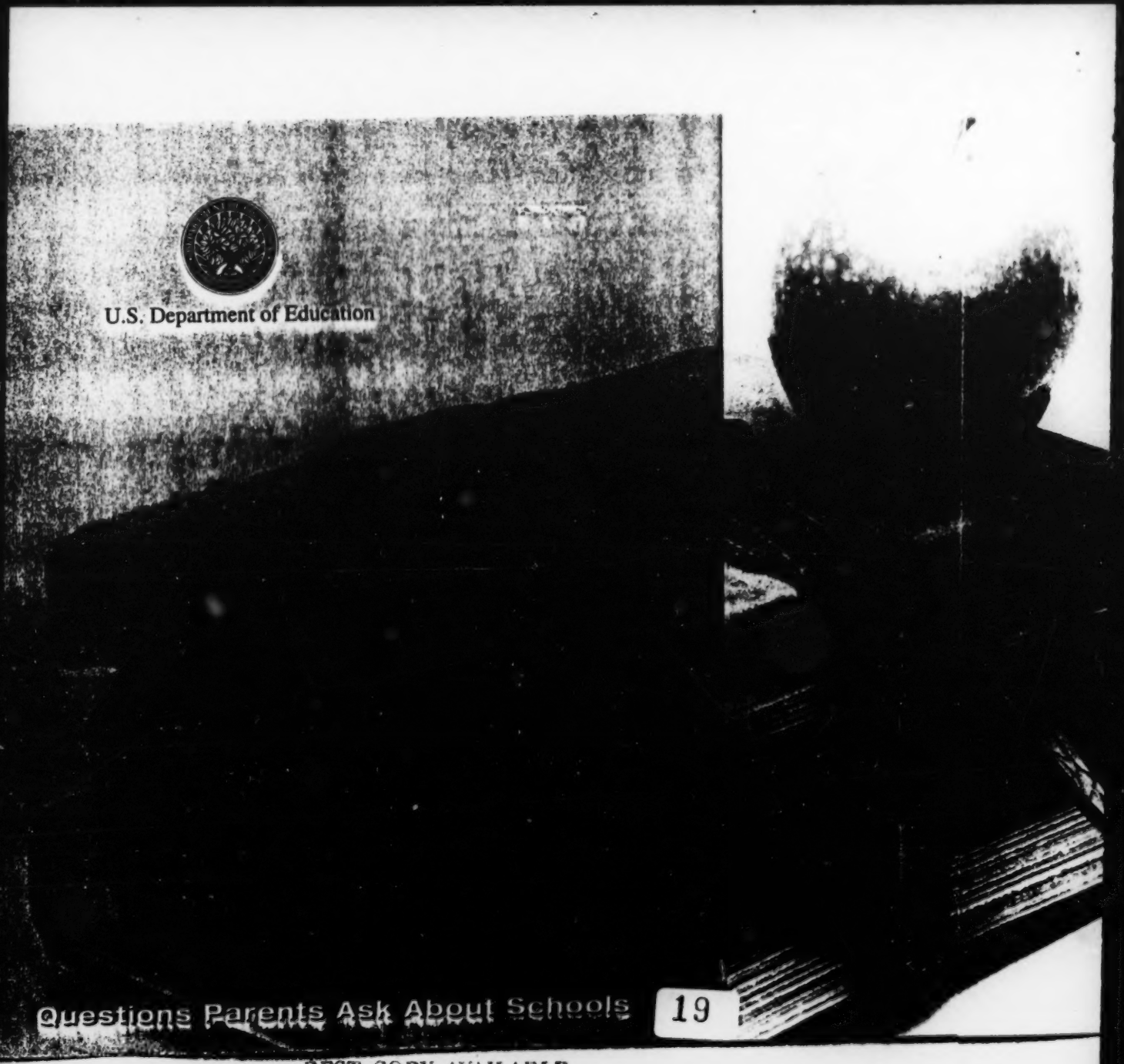

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